

## Chapter 12 - Public sector employee well-being: examining its determinants using the JD-R and P-E fit models

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### 12.1 Introduction

Within the organizational sciences, employee well-being is arguably one of the most frequently studied subjects (Boxall et al., 2016; Judge & Klinger, 2007). Studying employee well-being is not only considered worthwhile from an employee perspective, it is also believed to be an important determinant of organizational performance (Alfes et al., 2012; Van de Voorde et al., 2012). In this respect, the happy-productive worker hypothesis, which states that “happy employees exhibit higher levels of job-related performance behaviors than do unhappy employees” (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001: 182) is widely acknowledged. (Zelenski et al., 2008). One can thus argue that managing for public performance also implies managing public sector employee well-being.

Apart from being an important topic in the academic HRM literature, well-being is increasingly a concern for organizations. Public and private organizations are confronted with huge “well-being issues” with respect to their employees who have to deal with new organizational challenges. Moreover, since the 1980s, private and public organizations have implemented new management practices and tools to improve their external adaptation and their internal functioning. Furthermore, “doing more with less” has become the new managerial mantra, leading organizations to develop and implement detailed performance targets in order to achieve results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. These managerial practices and tools shape the work environment, and could result in positive but also negative effects on employees. In this regard, numerous empirical studies demonstrate that stress, burnout, and hardship at work are clearly increasing (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hsieh, 2012). Managing these “well-being issues and challenges” is of great importance, and this requires some knowledge of how to deal with this issue: one of the objectives of this chapter.

In this chapter, we focus on employee well-being within the public sector, and especially on its main determinants, using two theoretical models: the job demands–resources (JD-R) model and the person–environment (P-E) fit model. These are not the only models that have been deployed in empirical studies but are, in the literature, often seen as the main theoretical frameworks for studying well-being issues in organizations. Further, these models are relevant here as they clarify how individual, job, and organizational characteristics have a (positive or negative) effect on employee well-being. Although these models are general, and have not been specifically developed for the public sector, we will show that they can easily be applied in a public sector context. In this respect, as chapter 1 argued, one has to give attention to public sector characteristics and deal with the question ‘how does a public sector context affect employee well-being?’ In the same vein, we will also shed light on the current discussion regarding well-being and public service motivation (PSM). As is also explained in chapter 14 of this book, PSM is an important topic in the Public Administration (PA) literature. In terms of well-being, some articles argue that PSM can be an individual resource that helps in fighting stress and other negative outcomes, while others have identified negative consequences of PSM.

Before continuing, we should make clear that this chapter has its limitations. First, the literature on employee well-being – even when only considering public administration literature – is vast and we are not able to deal with every single study or even every aspect. It is also not our aim to produce a full systematic review. Our objective is more modest, to show the relevance of the JD-R and P-E fit frameworks when studying public sector employee well-being by discussing recent studies that we see as relevant to this aspect. Second, we will not discuss the relationship between well-being and performance. In this respect, we just note that the happy–productive worker hypothesis is contested (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001), and that not all studies have found a relationship between well-being and performance (Taylor, 2018). Moreover, as we will discuss in the next section, employee well-being is a multi-dimensional concept (Grant et al., 2007). In this respect, Van de Voorde et al. (2012) noted two competing perspectives on the relationship between well-being and organizational performance. For some dimensions of employee wellbeing, a ‘mutual gains’ perspective holds (e.g. well-being is congruent with organizational performance) but, for other dimensions, ‘conflicting outcomes’ are visible (e.g. employee well-being is at odds with organizational performance). Although we do not deny the importance of this issue, we do not address it in this chapter. The final limitation has to do with possible differences between public and private sector

employees with respect to aspects of employee well-being. Some studies have suggested that public sector employees score lower on several dimensions of well-being than private sector employees (Lyons et al., 2006; Goulet & Frank, 2002), and that this might be related to specific characteristics of public sector organizations (Rainey, 2009). Although this is a relevant observation, we limit ourselves to investigating determinants of well-being *within* the public sector, and do not make comparisons with other sectors.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. The next section sets the stage and outlines the three main ingredients that will be discussed: the concept of employee well-being plus the two theoretical frameworks (JD-R model and P-E fit). This is followed by a section which holds a discussion of studies using the JD-R model in a public sector context, followed by a similar discussion of studies using a P-E fit framework. Finally, in the last section, we draw conclusions and propose some possible directions for future research.

## **12.2 Employee well-being, JD-R and P-E fit**

### *Employee well-being*

Drawing on the work of Warr (1987), Grant, Christianson and Price (2007, 52) define well-being as “the overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work”. Various concepts are included within this overarching concept such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, burnout, absence due to sickness, and organizational support. As such it the concept is multidimensional (Grant et al., 2007; Van de Voorde et al., 2012) and several authors have tried to identify distinct dimensions. Some have made a distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being equates well-being to the attainment of pleasure or the avoidance of pain (using concepts such as happiness and satisfaction). Eudaimonic well-being focuses on the importance of “living a complete life, or the realization of valued human potentials” (Ryan et al., 2008) using concepts such as mastery and personal growth, and also engagement. Self-determination theory – which stresses with respect to well-being the importance of fulfilment in the areas of relatedness, competence, and autonomy – is one theory that draws on this.

This distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being relates to only one aspect of employee well-being, namely psychological well-being. Psychological well-being focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals, while Grant et al. (2007: 53) discern two other

dimensions of employee well-being: physical and social well-being. Physical well-being is related to both objective and subjective aspects of bodily health and includes work-related illnesses, stress, and sick leave. Social well-being (or 'relations') focuses on the interactions that occur between employees (Grant et al., 2007), including interaction with their supervisors or leaders. This dimension includes variables such as social support, leader-membership exchange, and trust.

In our description of existing public sector research, we will refer to these three psychological, physical, and social dimensions of well-being. As explained above, in this chapter we concentrate on two theoretical models which explain well-being at work (the JD-R and P-E fit models). Both models look for factors related to employees' well-being, such as engagement, and adopt a positive view of work. Further, both models include the three well-being dimensions identified earlier (psychological, physical, and social). As such, these perspectives might therefore bring relevant results for practitioners who seek to develop a healthy organizational environment, rather than merely identifying aspects that are detrimental to employees' well-being. Another important point is whether there are aspects of well-being that are specific to public sector workers. An obvious candidate for such a variable is Public Service Motivation (PSM), especially if one sees it as an eudaimonic concept. Enhancing PSM could contribute to a higher degree of self-realization and in this way it could contribute to enhanced employee well-being. Given that the PSM literature is vast, with some elements dealt with in chapter 14, we limit ourselves to discussing PSM as a concept that, within the JD-R and P-E fit frameworks, affects employee well-being. In other words, PSM will be discussed as a possible determinant of well-being, and not as an aspect of it.

### *The JD-R model*

The focus in this chapter is on how individual and organizational determinants affect public sector employees' well-being. A popular model to explain how and why specific job and organizational characteristics affect employee well-being is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model developed by, among others, Bakker, Schaufeli, and Demerouti (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). This model is a "heuristic model that specifies how employee well-being may be reproduced by two specific sets of working conditions" (Bakker et al., 2007) with job demands and job resources introduced as generic factors: "A central assumption in the JD-R model is that work characteristics may evoke two psychologically

different processes. In the first process, demanding aspects of work (i.e., work overload and complaining customers) lead to constant psychological overtaxing and in the long run to exhaustion. (...) In the second process proposed by the JD-R model, a lack of job resources precludes actual goal accomplishment, which causes failure and frustration" (Bakker et al., 2008: 311). In other words, job demands are factors that cost energy to deal with, such as high work pressure, complexity, and role ambiguity (Bakker, 2015). Job resources are factors that help individuals to deal with these demands, such as support and autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R theory proposes that job demands and job resources interact in shaping the work experiences and well-being of employees. In essence, job resources help in dealing with job demands. In principle, there is an unlimited number of variables that one could include under the headings of 'demands' and 'resources', and the choice depends on the specific research question or research context. This makes the model flexible (Bakker et al., 2014). Further, the model also includes personal resources (such as personality characteristics) alongside job resources.

The model describes two distinct pathways linking job demands and resources to employee well-being: a health impairment process and a motivational process (Bakker et al., 2014). Job demands are, if not matched by adequate resources, important predictors of health problems (such as burnout or repetitive strain injuries) because they deplete energy. Job resources, in contrast, are important determinants of motivation and engagement and contribute to the fulfilment of basic psychological, physical, and social needs (Bakker et al., 2014). More recently, the literature has made a further distinction between hindrance and challenging job demands, which can have different effects (Tadić et al., 2015). According to Tadić et al. (2015: 703), "challenge demands can trigger positive emotions and cognitions and increase work engagement and performance, whereas hindrance demands trigger negative emotions and cognitions and seem to undermine work engagement and performance".

Although hugely popular within organizational studies, we will show later in this chapter that the JD-R model has been less often used in public administration studies. Nevertheless, we will discuss some studies that more recently have done so, and show why the model can help to understand public sector employee well-being.

### *The P-E fit model*

Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) observe that the idea that there should be a “congruence” or “fit” between what individuals want and what they get from their work and/or organization has a long history in management science. The overarching concept that describes this has been called the ‘person–environment (P-E) fit’ and is defined by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005: 281) as “the compatibility between an individual and [their] work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched”. However, several distinctions can be made within this overarching concept. First, a complementary fit (individuals add something that was missing in the environment) should be discerned from a supplementary fit (individuals and the environment have similar characteristics). Second, a distinction can be made between a demand–abilities fit (individual skills are met by environmental demands) and a needs–supplies fit (environmental supplies meet individual needs) (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Finally, it is important to distinguish between four critical domains of fit: person–organization (P-O), person–job (P-J), person–group (P-G), and person–supervisor (P-S) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This chapter focuses on the first two fit dimensions. Nevertheless, one should note that other fit dimensions, such as the P-G fit, have also been identified as important antecedents of job satisfaction and stress in a public sector context (Giauque et al., 2014). It is also relevant to note that, in their study, Edwards and Billsberry (2010) showed that the P-E fit is a multidimensional concept and that different dimensions of the P-E fit separately influence work outcomes (commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to leave).

The P-E fit framework is – like the JD-R model – a well-accepted model within the organizational sciences, especially within organizational psychology. There, the attraction–selection–attrition, or ASA, model (Schneider et al., 1995) is often used to explain why people feel attracted to organizations (e.g. because they believe they ‘fit’ within the organization), why they are selected (because the organization believes they fit), and why they stay or leave (maybe because they are disappointed in the degree of fit). Implicitly, this model assumes that P-E fit is related to employee well-being, and especially with respect to the attrition component. Put simply, fit leads to well-being. Indeed, when joining an organization, employees expect to find themselves in a healthy work climate, one that fits with their expectations. Thus, they will compare their work environment with their expectations (their values, a specific vision of missions, tasks, and so on), which will result in either a perceived fit or misfit. This perception could be based on different fit dimensions such as organization fit or job fit. Explicitly, many studies have linked P-E fit and well-being. For instance, Verquer et al. (2003) conducted a meta-review that identified relationships between P-O fit

and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Later studies have also related the P-O fit to engagement (Memom et al., 2014) and health (Merecz & Andysz, 2012). Similar findings have also been reported concerning P-J fit and employee well-being (Park et al., 2011; Boon et al., 2011).

Perhaps surprisingly, the fit concept was seldom used in PA research until the early 2000s (Steijn, 2008). Vigoda and Cohen (2003: 195) considered this unfortunate since “the environment of non-profit organizations is unique and highly distinguished from ordinary for-profit companies”. However, as we will see, much has changed since then, with more recent PA studies having embraced the P-E fit perspective – especially with respect to the relevance of PSM as an important motivational lever within public organizations (van Loon et al., 2017).

### **12.3 The JD-R model and public sector research**

Although the JD-R model is one of the most significant models used in organizational sciences to explain well-being, it is not often referred to in the PA literature. An early 2020 literature search (using the key words “job demands”, “job resources” plus “public sector” or “public administration”) generated only twenty empirical studies within core PA journals (JPART, Public Administration, Public Administration Review and Public Management Review) that have explicitly used the model within the 2001-2019. Only four of these have been published before 2015. However, many more articles dealing with public sector employees have been published outside the PA field, mostly in journals linked to organizational behaviour (including the Journal of Organizational Behavior and the International Journal of Stress Management). We first give a brief overview of the main findings from the latter studies.

Many studies published outside the PA field have taken place in non-profit or public service organizations such as schools, home care organizations, and hospitals. A typical study is from Bakker et al. (2003) within the Dutch home care sector. This study explicitly tested the JD-R model and included seven job demands (workload, job content, problems with planning, physical demands, emotional demands, sexual harassment, and patient harassment) and six job resources (autonomy, social support, coaching by supervisor, possibilities for professional development, performance feedback, and financial rewards). Burnout was studied with respect to employee well-being. The study provided strong support for the relevance of the

JD-R model in this public sector context. More specifically, it provided support for the health impairment pathway (when job demands are high) and the motivational pathway (when job resources are lacking which results in “cynicism towards the job and reduced feelings of efficacy” – 2003: 33). A later study by Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) in the same sector studied the buffering effect of job resources and found that these could indeed buffer the effect of job demands – especially with respect to the relationship between emotional demands/patient harassment and burnout. Another study by Bakker et al. (2005) tested the buffering effect of job resources in an institute for higher education. Again, the essence of the JD-R model was confirmed and the results gave partial support for the hypothesis that a combination of high demands and low resources generates the highest levels of burnout. Similarly, a study by Lorente Prieto et al. (2008) of Spanish teachers illustrated the applicability of the JD-R model in public organizations. Unlike the previous studies, their study did not only include burnout but also looked at work engagement. It showed not only that work overload influenced burnout and engagement, but also that role conflict affected burnout, and that role ambiguity had an effect on engagement. These effects of role conflict and role ambiguity are especially relevant from a public administration perspective.

A study by Van den Broeck et al. (2017) is significant because it tested the relevance of the JD-R model with respect to burnout and engagement across four different sectors (industry, healthcare, business services, and the public sector). It is one of the few studies that applied the JD-R model to a core public sector, namely the civil service. The study looked at three job demands (workload, role conflict, and cognitive demands) and three job resources (social support, autonomy, and skill utilization). Interestingly, overall well-being (a combination of low burnout and high engagement) was highest in the healthcare sector. Burnout was highest in the public and the business services sectors. Work engagement was highest in the healthcare sector, and at a lower level in the other sectors. A more important finding is that their analysis found support for the JD-R model across all the sectors. As the authors stated: “each of the job demands and job resources were equally strongly related to burnout and work engagement across sectors” (Van den Broeck, 2017: 373). Notwithstanding the similar effect sizes, there were differences in the levels of job demands and job resources between sectors. In discussing the public sector, the authors noted that, on average, jobs seemed rather passive with, relatively, both low job demands and low job resources. The study therefore advised public sector managers to increase employees’ challenges and invest in job resources (2017: 374).



The studies discussed above did not explicitly study job demands and resources that are specific to public sector workers. For these, we need to turn to authors who have published in PA journals. In this respect, Hsieh (2012) studied emotional labour among public service workers and confirmed its potential effect on burnout. In line with the JD-R model, the study found that job resources (specifically job control, social support, and rewards) are able to mitigate this effect.

Recently, Borst et al. (2017) applied the JD-R framework in a public sector context (the Dutch local and central civil service). Based on their findings, they proposed three important adjustments to the original framework. First, they identified red tape as a potentially important hindrance demand on public sector employees. This fits with other studies that have identified red tape as a possible public sector specific job demand (Giauque et al., 2013; Steijn & Van der Voet, 2017). Second, building on a conceptual article by Bakker (2015), they identified PSM as an important personal resource that energizes public servants and thus theoretically should have a positive effect on engagement. This was confirmed in their study and resonates with other studies that have looked at PSM as a resource. However, Giauque et al. (2013) also studied PSM and found, in contrast to the hypothesis, that higher levels of PSM were related to higher levels of stress. This suggests that PSM does not always function as a resource, and could have a 'dark side' (see also Van Loon et al., 2015). Giauque et al. (2013: 73) suggested that employees with high PSM are also highly committed and "suffer from stress if they perceive an inability to reach their personal and organizational objectives due to organizational constraints or work environment burdens or pressures". Indeed, such a double-edged effect of PSM is also suggested by Borst et al. (2017) who found, alongside the positive effect on work engagement, that PSM also has an effect on turnover intention: employees with higher PSM are more inclined to turnover. Quratulain and Khan (2015) and Steijn and van der Voet (2017) reported similar effects. These findings raise the question as to whether PSM is really a resource or whether it also fuels feelings of incongruence between professionals' aspirations and their actual contributions to society (Quratulain & Khan, 2015). This is an issue we will return to in the next section on the P-E fit.

Borst et al.'s (2017) third adjustment to the JD-R framework is that they make an explicit distinction between work-related job resources (teamwork, job content, autonomy) and organization-related job resources (career development opportunities, supervisory support, performance management). They argue that this distinction is important because "public servants are more motivated by work characteristics than by organization-related

characteristics” (Borst et al., 2017: 5). Their findings supported this assertion and they interpreted it as a sign that civil servants “become (...) most engaged by intrinsic factors including work-related resources” (2017: 17). Interestingly, in their study, red tape has different relationships with work-related resources and with organizational-related resources. When red tape is high, work-related resources have a stronger effect on work engagement, but the effect of organizational-related resources is lower. Borst et al. (2017: 19) suggest that “it seems to be the case that organization-related resources in the public sector are automatically accompanied with more red tape which de facto lead to the evaporation of the positive effects of these resources on work engagement.”

Overall, it can be concluded that the JD-R model is appropriate for explaining employee well-being in the public sector – although the number of studies that have done so for the core public sector (e.g. the civil service) is limited. In general, the model can be used to study the effects of public sector employees’ job demands and job resources. In particular, the literature suggests that certain public sector demands (red tape) and resources (PSM) should be included in public sector research. That being said, further investigation is needed to assess and better distinguish the mechanisms and conditions that explain the contradictory effects of PSM identified in the literature: when is it a resource with positive effects, and when does it have unexpected negative effects (dark sides)?. It should also be noted that JD-R studies have only addressed employees’ psychological and physical well-being, and not considered social well-being as an outcome variable. To date, JD-R studies often treat social well-being (e.g. supervisor or social support) as a resource and not as a dimension of well-being (Dunseath et al., 1995; Giauque et al., 2016; Johnson, 1986).

#### **12.4 The P-E fit model and public sector research**

Before the early 2000s, few studies had adopted a P-E fit perspective within PA research. A notable exception is a study by Boxx et al. (1991) which showed that value congruence (“the fit between professed organizational values and the values deemed appropriate by employees” – 1991: 195) is an important predictor of satisfaction, commitment, and cohesion. As such, this early study showed a relationship between P-O fit (value congruence) and psychological well-being. More recently, many studies have taken a similar perspective and have used a P-O fit perspective to look at how individual needs (the values looked for by employees) are met by the organization.

Several studies have used the P-E fit perspective to study well-being. Indeed, numerous studies have found empirical evidence that this fit is positively associated with job attitudes (job satisfaction, subjective career success, intention to remain) and job behaviours such as citizenship behaviour (Christensen & Wright, 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Others have explicitly looked at employee well-being, with Vigoda-Gadot and Meiri (2008) demonstrating a relationship between New Public Management (NPM) values and employee well-being (e.g. satisfaction and commitment). Employees who were positive about their organization's core NPM values (responsiveness, transparency, innovativeness, achievement) expressed greater job satisfaction and commitment. Liu et al. (2010), who used a more traditional way of measuring the P-O fit of public sector employees, also reported a positive effect of P-O fit on job satisfaction.

In using NPM values as espoused organizational values, Vigoda-Gadot and Meiri (2008) are one of the few who have not used PSM as part of a public sector P-O fit perspective. Vandenberg (2007: 552) was, in his development of an institutional theory of PSM, one of the first to do so and stated that: "In terms of PSM, this means that civil servants will only demonstrate public service behavior to the extent that their organization embraces public service values as a principle". Bright (2008) showed that P-O fit mediated the relationships between PSM and both job satisfaction and turnover intention. His study not only showed that value congruence (in terms of PSM and organizational values) is important for employee well-being, but also that PSM and P-O fit are distinct and have separate effects. Gould-Williams et al. (2015) also looked at P-O fit as a mediator between PSM and several outcome variables including work-related stress. Similar to Bright, they found that P-O fit acted as a mediator: PSM was positively related to P-O fit and, through P-O fit, negatively related to work-related stress. Similar findings are also reported by Kim (2012) who studied job satisfaction and commitment.

In a conceptual article, Ryu (2017) warned against equating PSM with the P-E fit framework. One of his arguments was that PSM studies only use a needs-fulfilment fit perspective and, thus, were unable to "explain why individuals with high PSM prefer working for a specific organization over other organizations" (2017: 363). Although a valid observation, not all PSM researchers would probably agree with this assessment. Steijn (2008) introduced the concept of PSM-fit to argue that the effect of PSM on outcome variables depends on employees being able 'to use' their PSM. In support, he found a relationship between the degree of PSM-fit and job satisfaction. This argument fits within the P-E fit framework, and could also partly explain

why people prefer one organization to another. Possibly, employees perceive a greater ability to put their PSM values into practice in one public organization than in another.

The PSM-fit concept also relates to another discussion that has already been touched upon. Accepting the concept of PSM-fit also implies there could be a misfit. Steijn (2008) suggested that the increase of NPM-like values within the public sector could increase this misfit if these values are at odds with the values held by the employees. This suggests that the effect of PSM on employee well-being is not always positive and could be negative under certain conditions. For instance, van Loon et al. (2015) showed that the relationship between PSM and well-being is dependent on institutional logics. More specifically, the effect of PSM on well-being is related to the societal impact potential (SIP) through the job and organization type. According to their study, PSM is linked to higher burnout and lower job satisfaction in people-changing organizations when SIP is high. However, in people-processing organizations, it is a low SIP that leads to higher burnout and lower job satisfaction. In the first scenario, employees sacrifice themselves too much for society while, in the second, they are dissatisfied because they cannot contribute sufficiently. In other words, PSM can have a 'dark side'.

This 'dark side' was referred to earlier where Quratulain and Khan (2015) noted, in contrast to the PSM as a resource perspective, that PSM could also fuel feelings of incongruence between professionals' aspirations and their actual contributions to society. This observation was based partly on the 'dark side of PSM' literature and they empirically concluded that "(...) PSM exacerbates the adverse effects of red tape on negative employee attitudes and behaviors and that these effects are transmitted through the mechanism of resigned satisfaction". This view is supported by Steijn and Van der Voet (2017) who came to a similar conclusion about the relationship between PSM (or in their case prosocial motivation) and red tape, and noted that "red tape acts as a hindrance stressor that thwarts the realization of prosocial aspirations". PSM's "dark side" is clearly a work in progress. An article by Schott and Ritz (2018) identified only nine articles dealing with the unexpected negative consequences of PSM during the 1990-2016 period. They reported that PSM had been found to be related to stress, resigned satisfaction, lower physical well-being, involuntary or long-term absenteeism, and even to presentism. They also concluded that the empirical results were mixed and generally inconclusive. Schott and Ritz tried to explain the mechanisms through which such negative consequences occur. They argued that a complementary P-E misfit might lead to negative attitudes, thereby highlighting the importance of the P-E fit perspective when

attempting to explain work outcomes. They invoked various theories (identity theory; psychological contract theory; ASA model) to explain how a P-E misfit has negative consequences, and “why highly public-service motivated individuals experience negative attitudes if they feel that their jobs do not allow them to contribute to society” (Schott & Ritz, 2018: 33).

Overall, it seems fair to conclude that the P-E fit framework has earned its place within public sector research. As in traditional organizational studies, ‘fit’ is able to explain employee well-being. The general view is that higher fit translates into increased employee well-being. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the number of PA studies that have studied employee well-being from this perspective is rather limited. In fact, only certain elements (job satisfaction, commitment, work-related stress) have been studied in relation to well-being. There are virtually no PA studies addressing eudaimonic well-being (for instance, engagement) or more general aspects of health. Further, there are only a few studies on social well-being. Moreover, most studies have investigated only one dimension of P-E fit, and mainly P-O fit. This is regrettable since some studies have shown that other fit dimensions are worth studying in relation to work outcomes (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010; Giauque et al., 2013).

## **12.5 Conclusions and suggestions for future research**

A number of conclusions can be drawn based on the foregoing considerations. First, although well-being is an important topic for organizations, further research is still required to fully understand its antecedents and consequences in a public sector context. In this respect, the two models most commonly deployed to investigate well-being (the JD-R and P-E fit models) give valuable insights, but so far these models have not been sufficiently exploited in the PA literature. For example, only a limited number of employee well-being outcomes have been studied, and although some concepts (such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction) have been extensively studied, others need further investigation. This holds for both eudaimonic well-being concepts (such as engagement) and for more ‘negative’ concepts such as burnout, resignation, and absenteeism. Referring to the three-way distinction made earlier between psychological, physical, and social well-being, it should also be noted that very few PA studies have addressed social well-being using either the JD-R or the P-E fit perspective.

Second, it would be useful to investigate differences in employees' well-being between sectors (public, private, and non-profit) and within subsectors of the public sector. The study by Van den Broeck et al. (2017) is an important starting point for this. However, their study included only a limited number of demands and resources and it is not certain that their conclusion that the JD-R model is equally relevant for the various sectors will hold if other demands or resources are included. Indeed, some occupations, or jobs, could be more susceptible than others to emotional demands or job strains. For instance, the literature on street-level bureaucracies suggests that front-line workers have more difficult work conditions, which could lead to negative work outcomes (Brodtkin, 2012; Destler, 2017). Further, as we have seen, red tape has already been identified as a significant hindrance demand that may well be specific to a public sector context. Further research is needed, especially with respect to issues whether recent public management reforms have increased red tape, which types of employees are most affected by it, and what resources employees have to deal with. Further, the observation by Borst et al. (2017) that the positive effects of organizational resources are thwarted by red tape in a public sector context deserves further study. Although red tape appears to be a job demand that is particularly relevant for public administration studies, other potential demands also deserve further study. In this respect, role conflict and role ambiguity are relevant since public sector workers are potentially more prone to these phenomena. Although some studies have addressed emotional labour (Rayner & Espinoza, 2015), the effect of emotional labour on well-being, and the possible mitigating effect of job resources, also warrant further study in a public sector context.

Third, PSM is clearly an important concept when studying well-being in a public sector context. It fits well within both the P-E fit perspective and the JD-R model. In terms of the former, employees with high PSM are attracted to public organizations as the values espoused by public organizations match their needs and, through a P-O fit mechanism, PSM enhances employee well-being. Nevertheless, further investigations are needed because, as Bright (2008) showed, P-O fit values are distinct from PSM values, and it would be valuable to test this "non-congruence" hypothesis. With respect to the JD-R model, PSM has been explicitly identified by Bakker (2015) as an important and available resource for public sector workers. Indeed, the PSM literature has extensively demonstrated that it may lead to positive outcomes. However, there is some empirical evidence that PSM is also related to negative outcomes when employees are confronted by certain organizational constraints (such as red tape). Currently, it is unclear whether this issue is specific to public organizations, or also exists in

private and non-profit organizations. In this respect, it is likely that recent public management reforms have influenced employees' well-being. Recent literature has reported that the frequency of change and the impact of change influence employee behaviours, that organizational support and resources may enhance positive attitudes toward change, and that reforms are not always seen as negative by public employees (Akhtar et al., 2016; Giauque, 2015; Greasley et al., 2009). These and other studies demonstrate the value to continue the study on the links between reforms and well-being.

A final important avenue for further research concerns the relationship between the P-E fit perspective and the JD-R model. This topic arose in the discussion on the possible dark side of PSM. On the one hand, employees with high PSM are attracted to public organizations (which fits with the P-O fit perspective), but, on the other hand, the JD-R model would suggest that specific demands (red tape) thwart the fulfilment of employees' PSM. Further, some resources (such as leader or social support) could also affect this relationship between demands and needs fulfilment. Further research into the question of how job demands and resources could affect the various fits seems an interesting subject for further study.

Finally, the discussion suggests some relevant practical considerations. We have seen that there are many ways in which managers can positively influence employee well-being. The P-E fit perspective illustrates the importance of aligning the employees' and the organization's values (Gould-Williams et al., 2015) as this will have a positive effect on employee well-being. The JD-R model provided additional insight into the importance of balancing job demands and job resources. When it comes to well-being, other research has highlighted the importance of resources such as trust (Alfes et al., 2012), perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1990), social support (Johnson, 1986), work-life balance (Worrall & Cooper, 2007), and public service values (Andersen et al., 2013). Also relevant is the observation by Van den Broeck et al. (2017) that many public sector jobs appear to be passive and would benefit from an increase in employees' challenges and an investment in job resources. Borst et al. (2017) concur by showing that increasing work resources (such as autonomy and social support) will be more effective to enhance well-being than investing in organizational resources, albeit only when red tape is high. Thus investing in organizational resources is worthwhile provided managers are able to reduce red tape. Further, well-being is also influenced by job and organizational characteristics (van Loon et al., 2015).

Consequently, practices and tools aimed at enhancing public employees' well-being need to be adapted to the specifics of the organization's main mission (people-changing or people-

processing organizations), or to the specificities of the job (street-level or back-office). Without doubt, practitioners can benefit from the considerable empirical evidence when addressing well-being and occupational health issues in their organization.

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